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ABSTRACT

Two strikingly contrasting culture groups, Latin Americans and Anglo Americans, overlap in a Borderlands that straddles the international boundary between the United States and Mexico. This overlap began with the Aztec conquest by Cortes which triggered the intermixing and miscegenation between Spaniards and Indians that produced a mestizo people and a Mexican culture. Anglo intrusion began when Mexico opened her northern frontier to trade with non-Mexicans and, in the case of Texas, even invited non-Mexicans to colonize through her empresario policy. The 1845 annexation of Texas, the 1848 Mexican Cession, together with the 1853 purchase of present-day southern Arizona, taken together, realigned Mexico's northern frontier politically, thus making Mexican Americans of the Mexican population, at least nominally. After the mid-nineteenth century, three processes reshaped the geography of the Mexican-origin people: contiguous expansion, Mexican intrusion, and peripheral attraction. Thus, Mexican-origin people became a sizable, distinctive, and diverse minority. The concentration of Mexican-origin people in the American Southwest is geographically significant because, in a demographic sense, their presence means that Latin America "shades off" into the United States, and they constitute a cultural region. Thus, people of Mexican-origin have played a major role in the Hispanicization of the United States. (NQA)

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"The Hispanicization of the United States"

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Note: Some 35 maps, photos, and tables were shown in slides to illustrate the oral presentation of this paper. Only four could be reproduced here.

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THE HISPANICIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES by Richard L. Nostrand
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Two strikingly contrasting culture groups, Latin Americans and Anglo Americans, overlap in a Borderlands that straddles the international boundary between the United States and Mexico. North of that boundary the sizable Latin population gradually decreases, yet south of it only a relatively small number of Anglos may be found. My purposes are to review how these two peoples came to overlap, to identify five subcultures that are the products of overlap, and to analyze the roll of the Spanish/Mexican American in the Hispanicization of the United States.

Florencio Quintana lives in the village of El Cerrito, New Mexico, where he was born. His father, Luís María Quintana, had been the village patrón. His great grandfather, an immigrant from Spain, had founded El Cerrito in the 1830s. Florencio speaks Spanish almost exclusively, he identifies with his Spanish background, and he calls himself a "Spanish American."

Sofia and Aida Bernstein were born in Baja California. They are the daughters of a German Jew (who, to avoid conscription, had emigrated to Mexico) and the daughter of the Governor of Baja California. To avoid the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution, Sofia and Aida moved to Los Angeles where they have lived ever since. They are fluent in Spanish and English, they are devout Roman Catholics, they identify with their Mexican background, and they call themselves "Mexican Americans."

Florencio Quintana and the Bernstein sisters are examples of old stock and first generation Americans of Spanish-Indian or Mexican descent--a minority that I shall call the Mexican-origin population. In 1980 the Bureau of the Census enumerated 14.6 million "Hispanics" in the United States. The largest single group, also the most deeply-rooted in the United States, is the Mexican-origin population. People of Mexican-origin, unlike other Hispanics, have played a major role in the Hispanicization of the United States, and in this paper I focus entirely on them. My purpose, first, is to review the geographical role Mexican-origin people played in the Hispanicization of the United States, and, secondly, I shall suggest why Mexican-origin people are geographically significant.

Spanish Outpost-Clusters

The Aztec conquest by Cortés was an event of singular importance in the experience of the Mexican-origin population. That conquest triggered the intermixing and miscegenation between Spaniards and Indians that produced a mestizo people and a Mexican culture. Thus, in 1521, Hernán Cortés toppled Moctezuma II, the Aztec emperor who ruled Mexico's Central Plateau, and the Valley of Mexico became both a hearth area for a new culture and the core area of New Spain.

The eventual colonization of New Spain's far northern frontier was not the result of one grand march to the north but of lesser enterprises separated in time and space. The initial thrust went to New Mexico where, in 1598, colonists were attracted by sedentary Pueblo Indians. In 1700 Jesuits pushed north into Pimería Alta, an outpost-cluster that was forever plagued by Apache raids. Beginning in the early 1700s, scattered settlements were established in Texas, and in 1769 coastal Alta California came to be populated.

By the end of Spanish rule four outpost-clusters existed in this remote and, quite frankly, uninviting frontier. All four were isolated from each other and were only tenuously connected with the core area of New Spain. The New Mexico outpost-cluster, however, was a century or more older than the others, and it contained three-fourths of the people in that far northern frontier--factors that explain in part why a significant Hispano subculture developed there.

Anglo Intrusion

In 1821 Mexico won her independence from Spain. She immediately

opened her northern frontier to trade with non-Mexicans and, in the case of Texas, she even invited non-Mexicans to colonize through her empresario policy. Opening her frontier proved to be a mistake.

The very year Mexico became independent, a trader from Missouri arrived in Santa Fe to initiate commerce between Santa Fe and the "States." A demand for horses and mules in Santa Fe prompted New Mexicans to pioneer a pack trail to California, and the first example of sustained contact between any of the outpost-clusters developed over the Spanish Trail. The very next year, 1822, sailing vessels from Boston began to ply the coast of Alta California in search of hides and tallow. And, in 1823, San Felipe, the headquarters of Austin's empresario grant, became the first non-Mexican toehold in Texas.

During the Mexican era the number of traders who remained permanantly in New Mexico and California was small. By contrast, thousands of Anglo-Americans and European-born poured into Texas--where they quickly outnumbered the old Tejano population. The numerical strength of these new arrivals facilitated that group's bid for independence from Mexico in 1836. The Texas Republic was then annexed to the United States, an event that prompted the Mexican War and culminated in the Mexican Cession. Now, the annexation of Texas in 1845 and the Mexican Cession in 1848, together with the purchase of present-day southern Arizona by James Gadsden in 1853, taken together, were a second event of singular importance in the Mexican Americans' experience: they realigned Mexico's northern frontier politically, and that made Mexican Americans of the Mexican population, at least nominally.

Geographic Change

After the Mexican War Mexicans residing in the United States were given one year to repatriate or become American citizens. Nearly all 100,000 of them--who, owed to the recent influx of Anglos, constituted only twenty percent of the enumerated population in 1850--remained to become American citizens. After the mid-nineteenth century several processes reshaped the geography of these people of Mexican-origin.

The first was contiguous expansion--initially, from populous New Mexico, where, at mid-century, three-fourths of all Mexican-origin people still resided. In 1851 San Luis was settled in present-day southern Colorado, three years later nearby Conejos was added, and gradually a northward-pushing folk migration brought Colorado into the Borderlands, with centers like Pueblo and Denver being added in the twentieth century. In the 1870s New Mexican farmers and sheepmen also pushed west to Arizona and they pushed east into the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma.

The second process was Mexican intrusion. In the nineteenth century the number of immigrants arriving from Mexico each year was so small compared to the influx of Anglos that some thought that people of Mexican-origin would all but disappear. In the twentieth century, however, the number of immigrants from Mexico swelled, especially during the era of the Mexican Revolution, the 1920s, and the 1950s. In the 1960s, quotas were imposed on the number who could immigrate, but Mexican immigrants continued to arrive, only now they were "undocumenteds," as illegal migrants are known. Texas and California were the major destinations for both the legal migrants and the undocumenteds.

The third process was peripheral attraction. Following World War I, persons of Mexican-origin, some of them immigrants, were attracted to Chicago, Gary, Detroit, and other steel mill communities beyond the Southwest. So large did the Mexican community in Chicago become that by 1980 Illinois had surpassed Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado to rank behind California and Texas in its number of Mexican-origin people. Today, at least some people of Mexican-origin live in all states, and the minority is very much national in distribution.

Still, some eighty-five percent of all people of Mexican-origin today are concentrated in the five southwestern states. The largest numbers are found in California and Texas, a complete reversal from the mid-nineteenth century when most were located in New Mexico. Percentages of persons of Mexican-origin are highest in south Texas and north-central New Mexico-southern Colorado. Generally speaking, numbers and percentages of this minority decrease away from the international boundary.

The Outcome

What does all this amount to? First of all, people of Mexican-origin constitute a sizable minority. In 1980 the Bureau of the Census distinguished between four types of Hispanics: persons of Mexican-origin, Puerto Rican-origin, Cuban-origin, and others. Persons of Mexican-origin numbered 8.7 million. Because most of the estimated 1.5-5 million undocumenteds were also of Mexican-origin, the Mexican-origin subgroup can claim at least 10 million; only blacks exceed it in sheer numbers.

Secondly, persons of Mexican-origin constitute a distinctive minority. Like Mexicans in Mexico, Mexican-origin people are by and

large mestizo, meaning that they are part Spanish and part Indian. Like Mexicans in Mexico, they are largely Roman Catholic, and their Catholicism is one that is permeated with Indian superstitions and beliefs. Unlike most Mexicans, however, they speak both Spanish and English; indeed, they are America's largest linguistic minority. Unlike most Americans, moreover, they are disadvantaged educationally, which is reflected in their occupational structure, and they are segregated residentially.

Thirdly, persons of Mexican-origin constitute a diverse minority. Some, like Florencio Quintana, are old stock Americans, and some, like the Bernsteins, are recent arrivals. Variations in self-referents illuminate the main subcultures: Spanish Americans, Latin Americans, Mexican Americans, and Mexicans. Spanish Americans, for example, are separated from the larger minority for a number of subtle reasons including a Spanish language characterized by archaisms, Spanish surnames and given names that are peculiar, the carving of religious figures called Santos, a Penitente Brotherhood, and the use of quantities of chili in food preparation.

The Geographical Significance

People of Mexican-origin, thus, are products of the Borderlands--that zone in the Western Hemisphere where the strikingly contrasting Latin and Anglo cultures overlap. Four other identifiable subcultures are also products of this Borderlands: 1) the "American Mexican," as the counterpart of the Mexican American might be called--that relatively small group of Americans who live in northern Mexico; 2) Norteños, a regional variant of Mexican culture that is recognized to be different

because Norteños have been "bleached" by their proximity to Americans; 3) the "Hispanicized Anglo," or those Anglo residents of the southwestern Borderlands who call pottery jars ollas, who hang red chili peppers from their porches, and who name their curvilinear streets Monte Vista or Loma Linda; and 4) a borderline "hybrid culture."

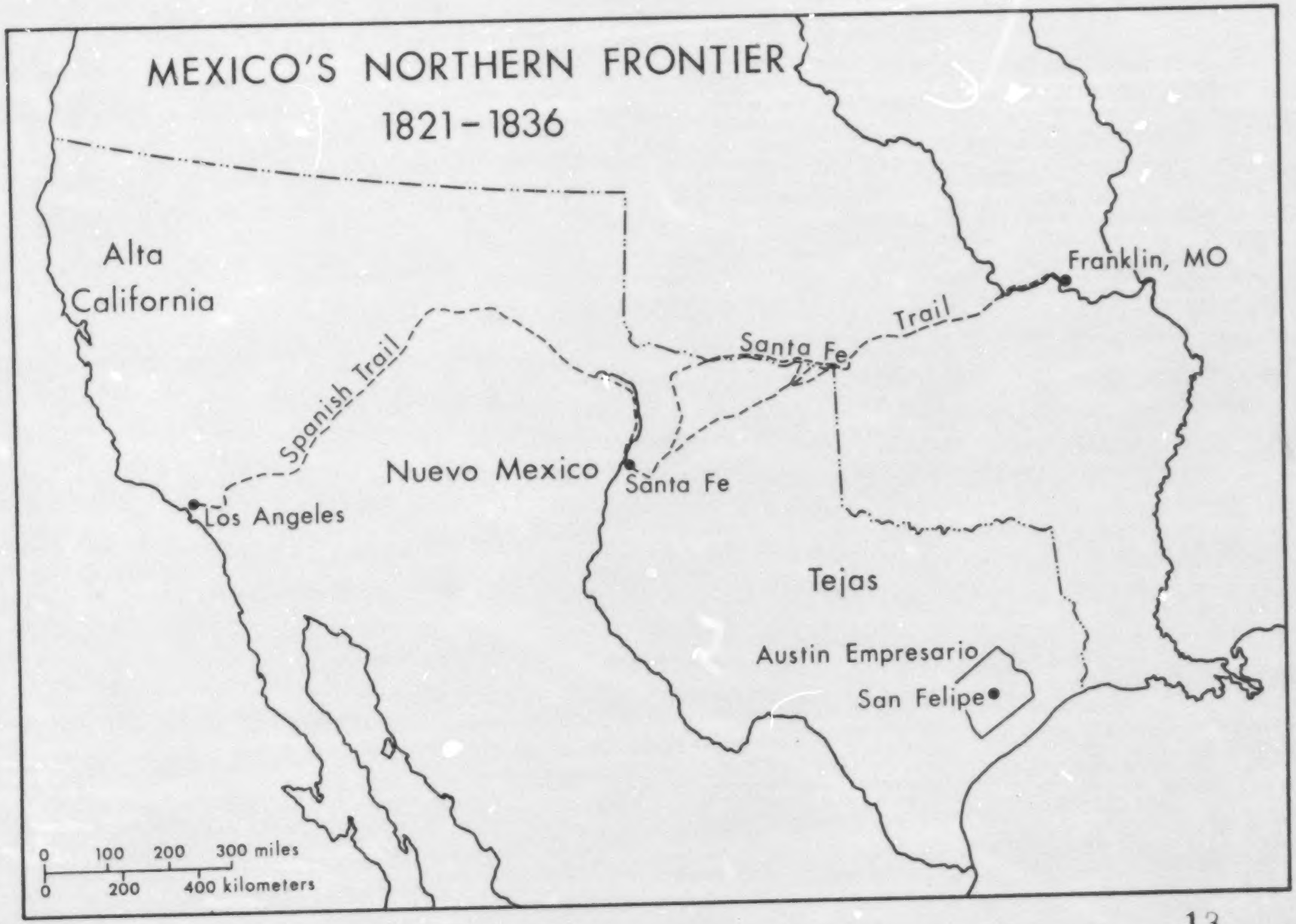
Of the five identifiable subcultures, people of Mexican-origin are the largest, and they represent the greatest degree of Anglo-Latin fusion. Their concentration north of the international boundary makes them geographically significant: in a demographic sense, their presence means that Latin America "shades off" into the United States. By contrast, the absence of "American Mexicans" south of the international boundary means that Anglo-America abruptly ends at that line.

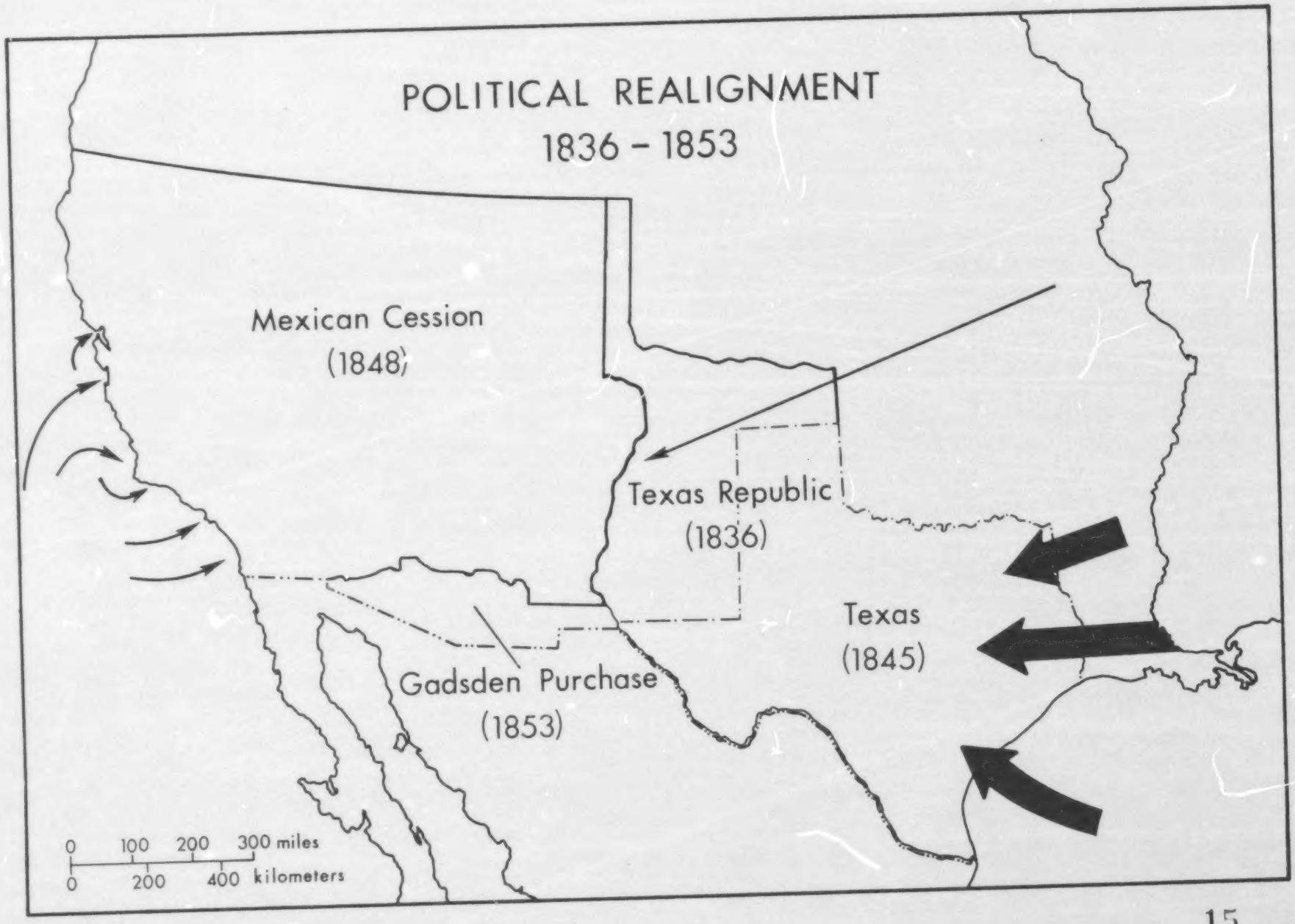
The concentration of Mexican-origin people in the American Southwest is geographically significant for a second reason. Where they are concentrated, people of Mexican-origin constitute a cultural region. Four reasons explain why an area can be called a cultural region: a sizable population, a population that is culturally distinctive, an old and deeply-rooted population, and a population that has stamped its imprint on the landscape. All four reasons make the southwestern Borderlands a cultural region. Indeed, the degree of cultural intensity and the richness of the Hispanic legacy in the southwestern Borderlands make it one of America's truly genuine cultural regions. Without doubt, the southwestern Borderlands is our foremost example of the Hispanicization of the United States.

Spanish-Origin Americans 1980

	Million
Mexican	8.7
Puerto Rico	2.0
Cuban	.9
Other	3.0
	14.6
Undocumented Hispanics	1.5 to 5

Christian Science Monitor, 9/17/82, p. 6.


MEXICO'S NORTHERN FRONTIER
1821-1836
Alta California
Spanish Trail
Nuevo Mexico
Los Angeles
Santa Fe
Santa Fe Trail
Franklin, MO
Tejas
Austin Empresario
San Felipe
0 100 200 300 miles
0 200 400 kilometers


POLITICAL REALIGNMENT
1836 - 1853
Mexican Cession
(1848)
Texas Republic
(1836)
Texas
(1845)
Gadsden Purchase
(1853)
0 100 200 300 miles
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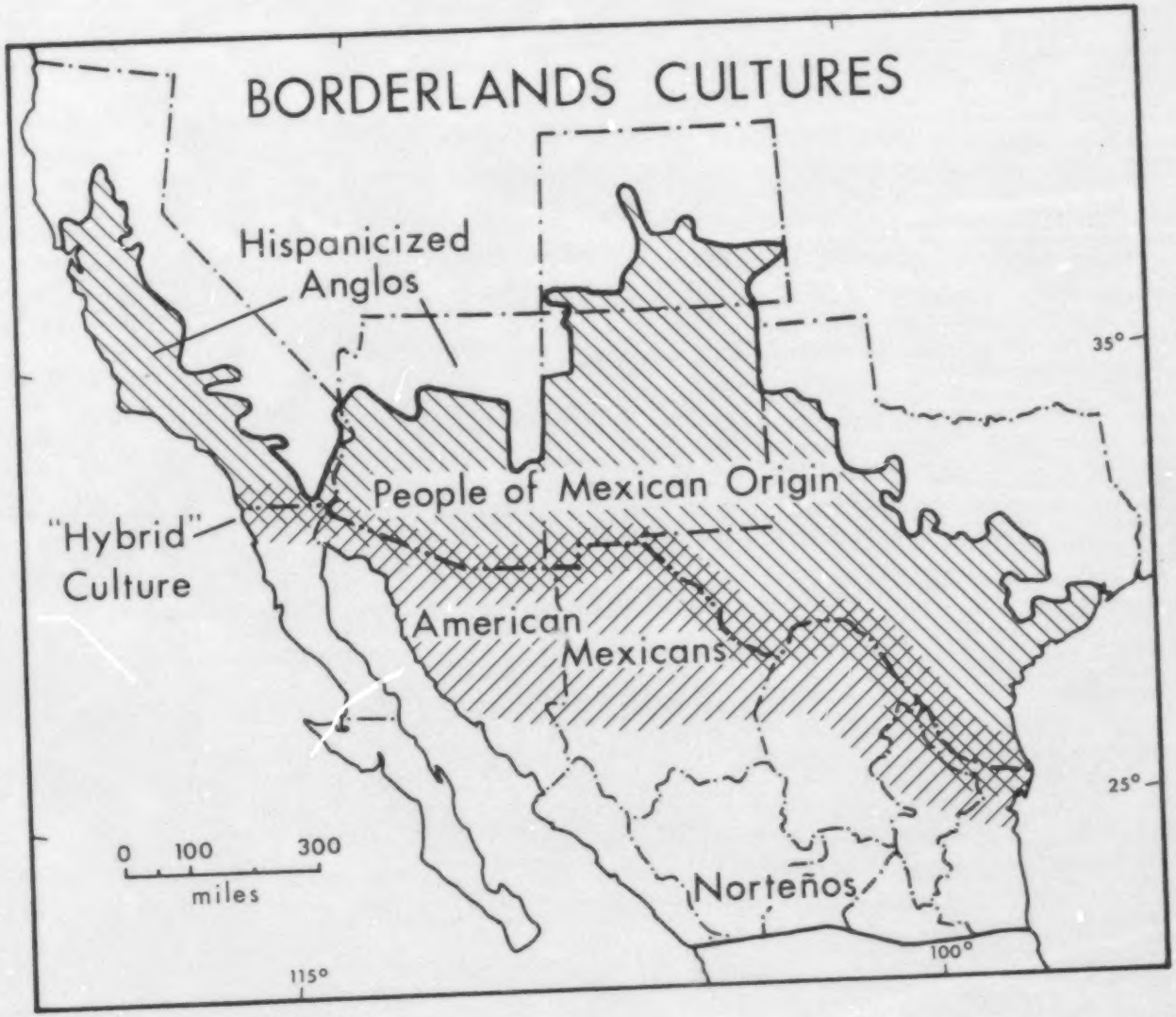
BORDERLANDS CULTURES
Hispanicized Anglos
People of Mexican Origin
"Hybrid" Culture
American Mexicans
Norteños
0 100 300
miles
35°
25°
115°
100°